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Clarke, Theodore Parker, and his Theology

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*Cover*

Theodore Parker, and his Theology :

A

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE MUSIC HALL, BOSTON,

SUNDAY, SEPT. 25, 1859.

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BY JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTICE.

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LEST the Unitarians, the Unitarian Association, or any others, should be held responsible for the following Sermon, I desire to say, that I wrote and preached it in my individual capacity, representing and compromising no one but myself. This is the first time that I have criticized, in any church, the specialities in theology of my friend, THEODORE PARKER. I have now done it in his own pulpit, to his own people, and with their full consent. If I am condemned for doing this, I can only say, that, in my view, we have too much theological *backbiting*; for what else shall we call it,—to preach to the people sitting in one church, about the errors of the people who are sitting in another? But when, as on this occasion, hearers are found candid enough to listen to both sides of important questions in Theology, it seems to be right and proper to use that opportunity, and preach to them.

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

Boston, Sept. 29, 1859.

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## DISCOURSE.

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John xiv. 28: "I GO AWAY, AND COME TO YOU."

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PEOPLE sometimes come to us when they go away; nearer to us in their absence than they were in their presence. Jesus did not fully come to his disciples' understandings or hearts till he had gone away from their outward presence. The friend leaves us; and then, from the little eminence of absence, we see and know him better than when he was more near. The little child goes to another world; and the mother puts him into her heart, and holds him there, sanctified, glorified, transfigured by her love, for ever. The wife goes; and the husband sits by his lonely evening fire, and recalls her acts of thoughtful love, disinterested kindness, and patient endurance, which he never noticed at the time. So the traveller, when close to the walls of Strasburg, looks up in vain to see the mighty tower of her minster: it is too near to be seen, eclipsed by lower walls and buildings. But, as he leaves the city, these sink and it rises, till they have sunk wholly into the plain; and it stands alone in full sight, though miles and miles away. For, the greater the man, the more he needs absence and distance in order to be known. The greatest man who ever lived said that a prophet had not honor in his own country. He himself did not begin to be understood till the world had floated away from him three centuries' distance. By that time, it began to get a clear view of the Divinity



which was in him. It took many centuries more for it to see his Humanity. Hereafter it may see both.

Thus do absence and distance reveal men to us, and the greatest qualities of our friends are seldom seen till they are gone. They go away, and come to us.

But there may be made of great men these two divisions, — those whom we miss after they have gone, and those whom we do not miss. There is one class of persons whom we admire very much when they are with us, but whose places are easily filled; and another, whom we, perhaps, quarrel with while we have them, but miss and mourn after they are gone. The class which we do not miss consists of those whose greatness is in doing *better* than others what all are doing, in saying better than others what all are saying, in thinking out into clearer and more distinct opinion what all are dimly and confusedly beginning to think. We like them, because they are so like ourselves: we do not miss them, because fifty smaller men, combining their forces, are ready to do the same sort of work which the great man did. They originate nothing new, work out no new problems; and the waves of time soon rush together over the place where they go down.

The other class of great men consists of those whom we miss, because they were doing a work of their own, which no one else could do at all. These are originators, carving out their own way, thinking out their own thoughts, uttering and acting their own character.

I think that your friend and mine, Theodore Parker, belongs to this last division. His greatness is in the original force of his nature. He goes straight to the end, which his own mind has seen. He does a work of his own, which no one else can do; and now, when he is gone, we perceive it more and more.

Certain occasions remind us of certain men. Lord Bacon illustrates this in his "Advancement of Learning;" saying

that "learned men, forgotten in States, and not living in the eyes of men, are like the images of Cassius and Brutus in the funeral of Junia; of which, not being represented as many others were, Tacitus saith, '*Eo ipso præfulgebant quod non videbantur*,' — 'They were all the more conspicuous because they were not there.'"

Recently, in this city, we have had two ovations, accompanied with all manifestations of honor, to the memory of two of our departed great men. The first lasted two days; during which the city was moved by processions, funeral orations, funeral addresses, funeral speeches, by the tolling of bells and the firing of cannon, in honor of one of our most eminent lawyers; a man of great intellectual gifts, certainly, in his profession, and, in private life, said to be a warm friend and affectionate parent. But that which the public knew of him was, that he was a great and unscrupulous advocate; a man with marvellous power to make the worse appear the better reason; a man who had devoted the divine gift of intellect during long years to confusing Juries, puzzling Judges, making white seem black, and black white. The city of Boston paid such honors to this gentleman as it should reserve for its Franklins and Washingtons; and her judges and magistrates went from Faneuil Hall and Mr. Everett's eulogy to Essex-street Church and the remarkable funeral address of Dr. Nehemiah Adams, who told them how he had sent his pastor a royal octavo edition of Wordsworth, as a votive offering, on the birth of a child. To young, unsuspecting minds, this ceremony said, with all the authority of age, station, and religion, "Young man, take this man as your model. Be, like him, brilliant and successful. Do not make it your object to pursue the flying footsteps of truth, but to succeed, to win your case, to dazzle with words, to confuse with sophisms. Do this; for this is the ideal standard of greatness in the city of Boston, in the middle of the nineteenth century after the coming of Jesus Christ." Therefore, gazing on that funeral procession, and running over the

pages of that tinsel rhetoric, I saw the face that was not present; I heard the silent voice — the face of our Boston Socrates — going up and down our city to search out its shams, and expose them; the voice always a terror to despots and sophists. “*Eo ipso præfulgebat quod non videbatur.*”

We miss the voice which would surely have spoken in clear, healthy words, to expose the demoralizing tendency of such an ovation. The value of such a man, and our need of him, was pre-eminently manifest after he had gone.

And again we miss him to-day; when, if he were here, he would stand up in this place to say some necessary words concerning the recent inauguration of the statue of Webster: for is it not necessary for some one to say that this glorification of a great intellect is demoralizing? The majestic understanding of Webster none are disposed to question; but it was not associated with a moral character corresponding to it. The facts of his private life are an open secret, known to all, though spoken of by none. Yet he is eulogized by Christian ministers, and his biography is written for Sunday-school libraries, because, in pure intellect, he was the foremost man of the land. So these Christian ministers preach to the people of their flocks and to the lambs of their fold, “Seek first, *not* the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, but the Kingdom of Intellect and its successes.” Already in this land we worship intellect and idolize talent all too well. Do we not need one man to denounce that increasing idolatry?

But there is another criticism on the pageant of last week, for which we need Theodore Parker. On the 7th of March, 1850, Daniel Webster ceased to be the leader of the Bay State. For the sake of that presidential chair, which, Mr. Everett admits, was the object of his ambition, he renounced Massachusetts, and became an apostate from her most cherished principles, which he called her prejudices. If those principles are true, they are vitally true; and perhaps the

politicians who profess to hold them, and yet care so little for them, will find that the people of Massachusetts are of a different mind. On the 7th of March, 1850, Daniel Webster became "The Lost Leader" of Massachusetts. From that day he was nothing to her, nor she to him. His is not the image to stand before her State House. If a Republican Legislature and Governor consent to placing it there, a more Republican Legislature and Governor may be called on to remove it. It is when such things as these are done that we feel the need and mourn the absence of Theodore Parker; and at such times as these, and in the midst of such ovations as these, our Brutus and our Cassius — our Theodore Parker and Charles Sumner — are the more conspicuous because they are not here.

There are few men in any community who can speak the Truth plainly. A thousand things are whispered in the ear in closets, are talked about by gentlemen sitting together around a parlor fire, which no one ever utters aloud. It is not always, nor usually, because men are cowards. Courage is not such an uncommon quality. But it is because they value other things more than the truth: they do not love the truth for its own sake. They ask, "What good will it do to say these things? Why wound people's feelings unnecessarily? Why hurt those whom we love; hitting our own friends through their friends?" The man who worships Truth for its own sake, and speaks, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, is like a cool wind from the North blowing away the miasma of stagnant air in tropical lands. Such an one was Theodore Parker in our community.

In passing from Theodore Parker the Man to Theodore Parker the Theologian, I go from the region of hatred and love, of hostility or friendship, into that of pure, cold thought. The question now is not, "Do you like or dislike the man?"

but, "What do you think of his doctrines? Are they *true*, or are they *false*?" Though I love Plato, I must love truth more than Plato; and I recollect that there is no one who has more strongly urged upon us to disregard authority in the search of truth than he whose opinions we are now to examine.

The first question in Theology concerns the Sources of Knowledge. From whence does our religion come? Where are we to go for it? In what place shall we find it?

There are many answers to this question. Here are a few of them:—

The DEIST answers, "*We go to Nature.*"

The ROMAN CATHOLIC or PROTESTANT CHURCHMAN answers, "*We go to the Church and its Traditions.*"

The BIBLICAL PROTESTANT answers, "*We go to the Bible.*"

The MYSTIC answers, "We go to the Soul in its mysterious and higher moods, when abstracted from outward things."

The CHRISTIAN answers, "We go to Christ, as seen in Scripture, Christian History, or Christian Experience."

Such answers are given, with more or less distinctness, by these different classes. Theodore Parker gives a wholly different reply. Admitting all these as subordinate helps, the primal, adequate, and authoritative source of knowledge he declares to be the Individual Reason; not the faculty which *argues*, but that which *sees*,—the intuitive organ common to all mankind. This is not a *mystic* vision, for it is *rational* and *intellectual*; it is not a *special Inspiration*, for it is common to all men; it is not a Christian Experience, for it does not need the mediation of Christ for its action. It is an inward Eye, with which, as soon as it is open, we can perceive the three great facts,—God, Virtue, Immortality.

Perhaps this is the most original and important part of the work done by Mr. Parker.

It is true that Coleridge and many others have asserted the same fact, and claimed for Reason the same power; but not before has such a clear statement, fortified by such solid



reasons, been made in regard to the Intuitive Religious faculty. It was very necessary; for the existence and activity of this faculty are continually denied in the supposed interest of Christianity. They have been denied both by Orthodox and Heterodox Theologians,—by Mansell on the one hand, and by Andrews Norton on the other. Mansell, in the interest of High-Church Theology, tells us that we have no organ by which to take hold of the Spiritual World; and Norton declares, that man can have no intuitive knowledge, either of the existence of God or of his own immortality. Thus religious truth, not being perceived directly by the soul itself, must be received indirectly from without, through the senses. We may infer it by a process of reasoning from the works of nature, from natural order, or from miraculous interruption of that order. Taking the position, that all knowledge comes through the senses from without, and none through the soul from within, it follows that religious truth is not knowledge, but only belief; not certainty, but only probability: for, as we cannot perceive God, duty, or immortality, through the senses, they must be inferred by a process of reasoning from these sensible phenomena. They are, therefore, an inference of the logical understanding; therefore only a probability; therefore not knowledge. We have, then, only a probable God to oppose to a real World; probable Spirit to actual Matter; a probable future Immortality to an earthly life full of the most positive temptations and vivid excitements. Christianity, also, is made to rest on a long chain of argument; any link of which failing, the whole must go. For the argument stands thus:—

1. We infer the existence of God from the laws of the universe.
2. We infer the Divine power of Christ from his being able to suspend those laws.
3. We infer that he *did* suspend them, by the testimony of eye-witnesses who said so.

4. We infer that they said so, from the record of their speech in the New Testament.

5. We infer that this is a true Record, from its being quoted as such by a long file of Christian and Pagan writers, reaching back from the nineteenth century to the second.

Our faith in Christ must rest upon this chain of inferences, and is so made to rest by the Theologians who deny any intuitive perception of Spiritual things. From this sensational philosophy have naturally come religious Scepticism, Materialism, Rehabilitation of the Senses, Positivism, Science without God, and Atheism. I thank Theodore Parker for his energetic opposition to this doctrine; for his forcible assertion, in all his books, sermons, and lectures, that the soul has a power by which it can see spiritual things; and for thus teaching us that we can know God directly as we know the world directly; that we can know eternal life as certainly as we know temporal, be as sure of duty as we are of pleasure, and may rely on our inward experience in the last analysis as firmly as we can upon any outward experience.

Again: a natural and necessary inference from this doctrine has been, the distinction made by Mr. Parker between Religion and Theology; a distinction which deals a fatal blow to dogmatism and bigotry on the one side, while the principle out of which it flows destroys religious scepticism on the other. For the intuitive knowledge of God gives religious experience, while reflecting upon that experience gives theology, — the first belonging to life, and the second belonging only to opinion.

I wholly agree, I believe, with Theodore Parker, in the positive part of his Theology. In his recent work, he has given three great principles of religion, which the soul itself is able to perceive by its intuitive faculty; namely, "The Infinite Perfection of God," "The Adequacy of man for all his functions," and "The Absolute or Natural Religion." For what he has said, nobly and touchingly, in defence and exposi-

tion of these truths, in this book and elsewhere, against Atheism on the one side, and a narrow Orthodoxy on the other, I, for one, heartily thank him. I thank God, too, for raising up such a voice to speak in trumpet-tones in behalf of these grand ideas to a generation too much sunk in worldliness, too much held to the surface of life. How many there are whom this voice has recalled to deeper insight and higher aspiration; to whom it has revealed God, Truth, and Duty, as eternal realities; shown the awful nature of their Being, the wonderful capacities of the Soul, the great experiences of Human Life, and the infinite value of Existence! These things, names to them before, have become realities; and all life has assumed a new value under this sincere teaching. Equally grateful must those be who have been taught to distinguish the substance from the form, the essential from the unessential; have been emancipated from the letter into the freedom of the spirit; have found that religion was not a grovelling fear, but a courageous hope; that piety and humanity were its opposite faces; that all of life was sacred, and all duty religious duty; and so were led out of the clouds and mists of a narrow religion to the sunshine and free air of a manly piety.

But we all must have noticed, that, while great men and large bodies of men are usually right in what they assert, they are often wrong in what they deny. No man can see every thing: and most errors are defects; they come from what we omit to see. And this seems to have been the case with the Theology of Theodore Parker. Its positions are mostly right, its negations often wrong. And he has two mental characteristics which tend toward this kind of error,—the error of denying that which we do not see ourselves. These are the love of simplicity and the love of system; both admirable qualities, but each having its danger. Simplicity leads to clearness, decision, and strength. The more we simplify, the more clearly we see each important point.



But we may simplify too much, and make a thing clear by omitting part of the facts. This world is not simple, but very complex. Man's soul is complex; his life also complex. No simplistic theory will answer in Botany or Geology. Mathematics is not simple; nor is it probable that the laws of man's spiritual nature are exhaustively stated in these three propositions of our friend.

Another tendency of Mr. Parker's mind is toward System; also a very important and valuable tendency, but having its dangers also. By placing before us all the parts in their relations and congruities, it enables us to see the whole in its true perspective. We hold all the parts while we look at each. The systematic mind cannot easily be one-sided, nor is it readily confuted by the sudden production of an antagonist truth. All that Theodore Parker had gathered by patient study he loved to arrange, each thing in its place in the systematic whole. By a happy balance of joy in individual facts, and a strong desire for totality, he neither neglected the multitude of details, nor yet lost his way in this mass of facts. Some men's minds are filled with a great multitude of ill-assorted knowledges, crowded confusedly together like the mob around a muster-ground. Others have a very small number of very well arranged and drilled opinions, like a militia regiment thoroughly organized as regards its officers, but very thin in its rank and file. The thoughts, opinions, convictions, and varieties of knowledge in our friend's mind are like a well-appointed and thoroughly organized army, with full ranks, beautiful in its uniforms and its banners, inspired by the martial airs of its music, complete in all arms,—infantry, cavalry, engineers, artillery,—marching to the overthrow of a demoralized and discouraged enemy.

System is good; but Lord Bacon said, long ago, that it has the dangerous tendency of "reducing learning to empty generalities, leaving only the husks of science,—the kernel being expelled by the torture of the method;" and also, that "me-

thods, carrying the show of a total, do secure men as if they were at farthest." Let us see if some such danger as this has not touched our friend's theology.

For example. It no doubt simplifies Theology to put Christianity in the same class with all other religions, only in advance of them; and to put Christ with Confucius, Zoroaster, and Mohammed, differing from them in degree, but not in kind. This Mr. Parker has accordingly done. Christianity is, with him, the natural unfolding of man's religious nature, like "the five other historic forms of religion," and "must, ere long, prove a hinderance to human welfare; for it claims to be a Finality, and makes the whole of human nature wait upon an accident of Human History, and that accident the whim of some single man." He thinks that Christianity, like all the other forms of religion, must ultimately fail before the Absolute Religion. Nor does he find any special life in Christ, differencing him from other men, so as to make him the leader of the human race, and a peculiar manifestation of the Divine; but a partial life,—narrow in some things, mistaken in others, and wrong in others, though much better, on the whole, than any thing else which the race has yet produced.

In this view of Christ and Christianity, Mr. Parker has been misled, I think, by the force of his simplifying and systematizing mind. My reasons are these:—

The fact that the whole Christian church, in all ages and sects,—Catholic and Protestant,—has recognized such a special revelation in Christ, though not without its importance, I do not lay stress upon, since the same claim has been made for many other religions. But there are far weightier reasons than these:—

1. Christ's own idea of himself and of his religion.

If Jesus is acknowledged to be an historical person, as our friend fully admits, we know him historically through the Gospels. Grant, if you choose, that they are not without some errors: still they teach *something* true concerning him;

for otherwise we should know nothing about him, and he would *not* be an historical person. But, if they teach any thing, they teach that he asserted of himself special and peculiar illumination; that he declared himself to be "the light," not of the Jews, but "of the World;" claiming for his truth, that it was the Universal and Catholic religion. He declared himself to be "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," — the way *to* God, the truth *from* God, and the life *in* God. He claimed to be the special revealer of the Fatherly Character of God: "No man cometh to the Father but by me." He claimed perfect unison in spirit with the All-Perfect: "I and my Father are one," — a claim never ventured on before or since by any human being who was not a mere enthusiast. He claimed immunity from moral evil: "Which of you convinces me of sin?" — "If I have done evil, testify of the evil." In Him alone, of all the great teachers of mankind, humility and self-knowledge have not taken the form of a confession of ignorance, error, or sin. Socrates said that his wisdom consisted in knowing his own ignorance. Newton said that he was a child picking up shells on the shore of the great ocean of truth. The purest saints have made the most unreserved confession of their moral deficiency. But Jesus — certainly the calmest, wisest, least of an enthusiast, of men — shows nowhere the consciousness of sin or of error. *His* humility consisted in this, that, with the full consciousness of this exceptional position, he asked no honor for it, nor made any display of it, but considered it as given him by God providentially, for the special purpose that he might be by its means the servant and helper of his race. He was set apart from error and sin, that he might befriend effectually the most ignorant and the most sinful.

This consciousness of Jesus is an historical fact, which is to be explained. I see no adequate explanation for it but its reality.

2. In the second place, I think that such a manifestation of

the divine life in Jesus *was something to be expected*, and something which accords with the way of Providence and the reason of things.

In nature, we see a perfect manifestation of God.\* There is no blur in Nature's laws,—no failure in the return of her epochs: every cycle is exact. We can look back ten thousand years, or forward ten thousand years, calculating an eclipse of the Sun, and know that it has occurred, or will take place without fail, to the very second. Generation after generation, century after century, every genus, every species, of animal or vegetable life, obeys its unerring law. Every acorn which has germinated since the first oak grew has produced an oak; never any, by mistake or wilfulness, an elm. Every bee, since those which hummed in Eden, has gathered its honey or wax according to its unerring instinct. No passion—selfishness, wilfulness, or indolence—disturbs the perfect march of

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\* Mr. Emerson states this difference in one of his poems:—

“Erect as a sunbeam,  
Upspringeth the palm;  
The elephant browses  
Undaunted and calm.

The leaves, unashamed,  
In difference sweet,  
Play glad with the breezes,—  
Old playfellows meet.

Sea, air, land, and silence,  
Plant, quadruped, bird,  
By one music enchanted,  
One deity stirred.

But MAN crouches and blushes,  
Absconds and conceals;  
He creepeth and peepeth,  
He falters and steals.

Infirm, melancholy,  
Jealous glancing around,  
An oaf, an accomplice,  
He poisons the ground.”  
    &c., &c.

the great Kosmos. Therefore Nature, so far as it does reveal God, reveals him perfectly. God's thoughts of Space and Time, of Substance and Form, of Cause and Effect, of the Infinite and Finite; the One and All of Order, Beauty, Goodness, Wisdom, Power,—these are distinctly revealed in the perfect mirror of the material world.

But there are other divine ideas, which *man* was made to reveal, but which he does not as distinctly reveal. These are the human ideas of Justice, of Holiness, of Fatherly and Motherly Affection, of self-sacrificing Generosity, of forgiving and helping Love, of pure Aspiration, and heavenly Condescension. These are thoughts of God too, but the human side of God's thought, which cannot be seen in Nature, and can only be seen in Man.

But all their manifestations in mankind have been imperfect and inadequate. From the lowest forms of savage brutality, of tyranny, cruelty, falsehood, and self-indulgence, men have struggled up toward greater purity, generosity, justice, and nobleness; but none have reached their perfection. Shall there be no apex to this ascending pyramid? no point where antagonist virtues shall be reconciled, conflicting tendencies harmonized, truth and love be married to each other? Should there not be one human being the centre of the human race,—a full manifestation of THE DIVINE IN MAN? So shall we see how man is made in the image of God; so shall there be one aim given, to which humanity may tend; so one Captain and Head of the human race, through whom we can all come into union with each other, having found the common type of humanity which we have, imperfectly developed, in us all. By the presence of one such being, the whole race can be organized. Through him we know each other. He is the fixed point, around whom we can all crystallize. Without him, we are separate and independent atoms; but in him we can all find each other. Moreover, seeing the ideal of humanity once fully realized in him, we may believe that it is possi-



ble to be realized in us all. We see in him—in whom human nature is complete—that sin is unnatural; that moral evil is not the law of our nature, but its perversity; that it must, therefore, be a temporary thing, growing out of the condition of human freedom. Therefore, since the hope, the strength, and the union of the human race seems to depend upon its having such a head, we argue that what Jesus claims for himself so calmly is that which we might expect beforehand to find.

3. *There is an actual revelation in Christianity, special to itself, of God.* There is something in Christ not found in Nature, nor known through the intuitions of Reason, but absolutely necessary for the peace of the soul and the progress of the race.

This special revelation of Christianity—the one peculiar Word of God through Christ—I find to be God's love to the sinner. It is a revelation of pardon to the Conscience, of peace to Remorse, of hope to Despair. It is God leaving the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and going to find the one lost sheep. It is the only solution of the problem of Evil; the only law which takes up all mankind, good and bad, into one family, making the whole human race strictly and truly brethren.

No other revelation of God says any thing plainly of this; none offer forgiveness of sin. The laws of Nature never pardon. Law, as such, cannot forgive: it can only reward obedience and punish disobedience. No intuition of reason, nothing in the absolute religion of the soul, says more. They say to the sinner, "Repent, Reform, Cure yourself. Do what you ought to do, be what you ought to be, and you shall then be forgiven." And this is inspiring for the strong soul, which is capable of breaking away from its evil, and becoming what it ought to be. But it does not meet the case of the sinner, in whom sin is disease; who has tried to reform, and tried again and again, and has failed; who is discouraged;

in whom the spirit is willing, but the flesh weak; in whom sin has become a *law*, warring against the law of his mind; and who cries out in agony, Who shall deliver me from this dead body to which my living soul is fastened?

This is the case which Christ meets by his special revelation of God's special forgiving and saving love. As the mother is more proud of her strong, manly son, but loves more tenderly the sick, deformed, or crippled child; as the father rejoices in the virtues of his good, faithful, upright children, has them ever with him, and considers all that he has to be theirs, but yet yearns with a peculiar tenderness toward the poor, half-dead prodigal: so God, in Christ, manifests an infinite tenderness of pity toward the discouraged, the forlorn, the outcasts, and the reprobates.

Some do not need this for themselves. Those who are strong, whose course is straight onward, do not need it. I must frankly say, that I think Theodore Parker has not had any experience of sin in this kind. To him, sin is either ignorance of God's law, which he pities, and would enlighten; weakness, which he pities, and would help; or wilfulness, which he hates and rebukes. But sin as disease,—this profound depravity which has taken hold of the soul itself; not total, indeed, because united with a living conscience and living desire for good,—of this experience I see no recognition in his writings.

But how wide and how deep this experience is, we may conjecture from the great cry of mankind which has found its peace in this element of the Gospel. In some great leaders of the church,—like Paul, Augustine, and Luther,—all their life appears to flow out of this fountain of reconciling love. The Roman Catholic sees it in the mass and the sacraments; the Protestant, in the doctrine of the atonement; and ten thousand humble, simple-hearted Christians find it in Christ himself,—their Saviour, their Friend, their inward Support and Joy. The power of the Reformation was in a revival of

this vision of God's reconciling love, long overlaid with forms. This was the power of the great movement of Wesley. It is the power which to-day comforts and sustains the poor, the sick, the helpless and forlorn, with a peace which the world cannot give nor take away. I find this a special revelation of God in Christ, no doubt having its anticipations and suggestions elsewhere, but only perfectly mirrored in Him, the perfect human soul. As we see God's other attributes perfectly revealed in Nature, we find perfectly revealed in Christ his personal love to each individual soul, good or bad, only because it is his child.

In Theodore Parker's opposition to the MIRACLES of Jesus, I also find traces of his limitation by the methodizing tendency and simplifying tendency of his mind. If the phenomena reported in the New Testament are to be considered as violations of the laws of Nature, as Theology has often defined them, and as Theodore Parker defines them, they are open to grave objections. But they do not call themselves so; and the greatest Theologians in all ages have rejected this notion. They are the expressions of a hitherto unknown spiritual force modifying the action of the known laws which govern matter. The power of soul is supernatural always, and is always working miracles like those of Christ, though in lower forms. When the power of Love and Thought in Dorothea Dix conquers the raving frenzy of a maniac, and holds it suspended; when the power of Love in the Washingtonians overcomes the rooted habits of the drunkard; when Love and Thought enable a deaf, dumb, and blind child to communicate with the outward world; when Wisdom and Love in Florence Nightingale enabled her, a single-handed woman, to do what all the wealth, knowledge, and force of England could not do without her,—we see what Christ's miracles were, and what they meant. We are reminded of his promise: "Greater works than these shall ye do." That physical law should obey the force of soul is incredible only



when we regard outward nature as a machine, and its forces as unspiritual and dead. But if the order of Nature be spiritual, and not mechanical; if the great Spirit and his Angel-Ministers are present in sunshine and storm, in growth and decay,—then we can understand why the representative man, the central figure of the human race, the type of Mankind, should possess a royal power over Nature, and, by perfect truth and love, stand intimately united with its spiritual forces. The miracles of Jesus are the most sublime prophecy of the ultimate destruction of all evil by the advancing power of good. So let them stand, if unintelligible now, as prophecies of the future.

One word also upon Mr. Parker's criticisms on the Bible. He deserves only praise for his attacks, terrible as they are, upon that idolatry of the letter, which is the disgrace of the Protestant church; for his destructive argument against a blind faith in verbal Inspiration; and for his merciless denunciations against the claim for Scripture of an infallibility which it does not claim for itself. But is there no better and truer way than either a blind worship of the letter, or the treatment of the Bible as a purely human work? Can we not deny it to be an infallible composition, and yet believe that it is divine? Can we not admit that it contains some error, and yet ascribe to it the authority of a guide? Why not? Guides are usually fallible. Yet, when we find one who knows more of the way than we know ourselves, can we not follow him, notwithstanding his fallibility? Plato is an authority to the Platonist; and though he does not think him infallible, yet he does not immediately reject as absurd, or deny as false, that which he cannot understand. The student of Shakespeare, instead of rejecting the obscurities of Shakespeare, patiently studies them again and again; believing beforehand in the wisdom which he has not yet found. This faith in a writer is an immense help in our studies. But Theodore Parker, in his re-action against a superstitious

bibliolatry, shows less respect for the words of Paul than the Platonist feels for those of Plato, the Shakespearian for those of Shakespeare, or the Swedenborgian for those of Swedenborg. But if the inspiration of Paul be of a deeper and higher order than that of Plato or Swedenborg, as seems to be proved by the simple result of his life and writings, then his inspiration must have left its witness in all that he wrote; and all of it carries some weight of meaning. If we meet with any thing in these writings, so "rammed with life," which contradicts our present convictions, what shall we do? We may do one of three things: we may accept it at once, because Paul has said it; and this is what is done by the literalist. Or we may *reject* it at once as absurd or false; and this is what Theodore Parker would have us do. Or we may *wait*, neither accepting nor rejecting, but *looking*; believing that there is truth in it which is neither absurd, nor contradictory to other truths; having faith that a wise man means something when he talks, and that, if we seek for the meaning, we may find it.

These are my views, of course very briefly stated, of Theodore Parker, and of his opinions. We two have known and loved each other for some twenty years; but, during all that time, he has never loved my opinions, nor I his. My faith in Christ, as the central figure of the Human Race, the type of Humanity, and perfect manifestation of a personal God, has seemed to him overstrained, mystical, and without value. His exclusive reliance on Intuition, and his negative treatment of the New Testament, has seemed to me one-sided and destructive. My soul has felt the need of something more. By it I was not fed nor filled. In view of it, a certain shudder ran over me, as though the world was growing empty of life in the atmosphere of that theology. But the *man* was not cold; the *man* was not empty of life or of love, but filled with both. I have honored his manly courage, been

touched by his tender humanity, and grieved at the blow which terminated his labors here; for *my* Saviour, *my* Christ, is one who will honor and approve the manly soul which honestly disowns him but lives for virtue, more than the painted hypocrisy which utters all orthodoxy and practises all meanness. If Christ be God the Son, second Person in the Trinity, I had rather stand before his bar with Theodore Parker, who denies him, but follows in his steps, serving humanity; than with any Orthodox Doctor who writes South-side books to turn our sympathy for the oppressed into approbation for the oppressor. For the Christ of the New Testament (whatever be his rank in the universe) is one who cares nothing for his own personal position or honor, has no self-feeling to be wounded by any denial of his rights, and can never be offended by any mistake as to his office or authority. His holy anger is only for those who offend or injure his little ones,—his poor, his oppressed, his outcasts, his wretched, his forlorn.

I do not believe in the passing-away of Christianity before a more perfect faith. Christianity is to be the religion of the human race. It has all the elements of catholicity; it is purely human; it can take up into itself all forms of truth; it has already adapted itself to the leading races of mankind. Born among the Semitic tribes of Palestine, a Syrian religion, it invaded Europe, and took possession of it. It passed from the Hebrew to the Indo-European race, from the Greeks and Romans to the Goths, the Franks, the Lombards, and the Scandinavians in England, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, till it reached the Indians of North America, and Africans of the Cape of Good Hope. Of all the Religions of man, no other has been thus able to take into itself all ethnic varieties, as well as every degree of culture; meeting the wants of the African negro on one hand, and of Francis Verulam on the other. Nor is the highest idea of progress that which drops the past as it passes on to the future, and which

cuts off history from behind us at every step; but rather that which retains all threads of good from behind, while it goes on to new attainments. Christianity is a religion which comes not to destroy, but to fulfil; which gathers up the fragments which remain, that nothing be lost; which accepts and sanctifies the good and the truth in all nature, in all human discovery, in all past achievement, but always adds that which is needed by them all. This religion, personal, with love as its centre, with peace as its legacy, with Jesus, Son of man and Son of God, as its great head and inspiration, — this is the religion which the noble mind, generous heart, and upright conscience, of our friend ought, as it seems to me, to reverence far more than he does. This religion is the great altar where all the tribes of many-languaged man may bring their offerings, — an altar grand as that Mont Blanc, the constant sight of which is now feeding his soul with beauty. He ought not to say to this religion of Christianity, “Give way to something better; you were a help once, but are a hinderance now;” but rather (as Coleridge to that awful and divine mountain) he should say, —

“Rise, oh! ever rise,  
 Rise like a cloud of incense from the Earth,  
 Thou Kingly Spirit, throned among the hills;  
 Thou dread ambassador from Earth to Heaven.  
 Great Hierarch! tell thou the silent sky,  
 And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun,  
 Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God.”







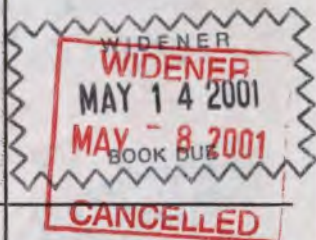


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